PARTNERS IN FLIGHT

OREGON-WASHINGTON CHAPTER

www.gorge.net/natres/pif.html Fall 2000

Partners in Flight is an international coalition of government agencies, conservation groups, academic institutions, private organizations and citizens dedicated to the long-term maintenance of healthy populations of native landbirds.

Wildfires and Birds...

What happens when it hits prime habitat in Eastern Washington?

by Heidi Brunkal and Bill LaFramboise, USFWS

On June 27, 2000 a fatal car accident on Highway 24 just east of its junction with SR 240 started a range fire in the dry, shrub-steppe vegetation of eastern Washington. Over the next several days, the fire fueled by drought conditions, high temperatures, and strong, erratic winds, burned nearly 164,000 acres. The fire encompassed large portions of the Hanford site, including the 77,000-acre Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve (ALE), a Research Natural Area and the first designated Important Bird Area (IBA) in Washington State. This area was also recently designated part of the Hanford Reach National Monument due to its outstanding biological diversity and integrity.

It may take a very long time to provide the same habitat value that existed before the fire due its well-developed pre-fire structure. Some impacted plant communities will take decades to re-establish to pre-fire levels. Without active restoration, some sage communities may never re-establish and may be replaced by non-native species. Bird communities within sagebrush zones are expected to take even longer to re-establish and thrive.

The ALE was identified as an IBA because it is one of the few remaining sizable, contiguous areas retaining vegetative communities and intact habitats representing pre-European settlement conditions. The area was noted for its importance as breeding habitat for migratory birds that rely on shrub-steppe habitat. Several of the birds that breed on ALE have state or federal status as species of concern in Washington or are Audubon Watch List species including Sage Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Sage Thrasher, Long-billed Curlew, Brewer's Sparrow and Burrowing Owl. Many of these species are territorial and demonstrate site tenacity especially during the breeding season. Loss of habitat may force birds to seek territory elsewhere, however, there is less and less shrub steppe habitat available and other areas are probably already occupied. Additional species of concern or Audubon Watch List species that frequent the area include Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, and Merlin.

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Bird Conservation Magazine to Focus on Pacific Northwest

Bird Conservation, the magazine about Partners in Flight and bird conservation throughout the Americas, will be devoting its Fall 2000 issue to the Pacific Northwest.

The entire magazine issue will highlight species, specific projects, and the people who are making a difference in landbird conservation. It will be on the street sometime in December, 2000. For more information about content, contact Bob Altman, alt8bird@aol.com.

Bird Conservation is published by the American Bird Conservancy.

/Wildfires (continued)

The fire resulted in removal of nearly all of the sagebrush cover on the ALE reserve. Post-fire vegetation assessments indicated a loss of greater than 85% of all shrub cover. Although extensive fires in 1957, 1973, 1981 and 1984 had removed sagebrush from large portions of the ALE, some large stands had escaped these previous burns. Many of the plants that were lost were 60-80 years old and provided significant habitat benefits. Mature sagebrush provided nesting, perch sites, thermal and escape cover for a variety of species. It also served as a food source and protected understory forbs from desiccation.

Sagebrush does not survive fire, and does not re-sprout from its base. It depends solely on seed to reproduce. Arid conditions often prevent germination, and seeds naturally lose their viability over time. These remaining blocks of habitat were locally and regionally important, due to the conversion of much of the former shrub-steppe area to irrigated agriculture and other types of development. Coupled with changes in habitat quality, due to invasive plants, such as cheatgrass, and noxious weeds, the ALE served as a reservoir and stronghold for many shrub-steppe obligates.

The direct impact on birds and the numbers observed after the fire was largely dependent on habitat, breeding phenology, and to a lesser extent, molt strategies. For grassland species, the results were varied. Before the fire, Grasshopper Sparrows were abundant in bluebunch wheatgrass zones until the end of July. However, after the fire they were observed only in small numbers until the first few days of July. At the time of the fire, many would have just fledged their first broods. However, the fledglings likely perished since they would have been at best weak flyers. A second brood was not attempted since the grass cover was destroyed. Surviving adults left the area early to migrate or to perform their pre-basic molt elsewhere.

The impact of the fire on Vesper Sparrows, also an abundant grassland species, was somewhat different. Vesper Sparrows begin breeding nearly a month earlier than Grasshopper Sparrows. Therefore, Vesper Sparrows likely had successful first broods. However, failed nests were found after the fire, which probably represented second or third broods. The pre-basic molts of Vesper Sparrows are on the summering grounds. After the fire, they were abundant until early September in riparian areas where many were observed molting before migration. Horned Larks are even earlier breeders and are an abundant wintering species. After the fire, they were observed throughout ALE in generally larger numbers than is typical for late summer during pre-fire years. It was interesting to note that Northern Harriers, a fairly common resident in grassland habitats, were not observed after the fire until migrants were observed in late September. After the fire there was an apparent post-breeding dispersal of Short-eared Owls onto the ALE to take advantage of reduced cover that made prey more accessible. ALE has many springs that support riparian growth that also sustained substantial fire damage. The impact of the fire on riparian breeders was also varied. With the exception of a few late nesters, most Western Kingbirds had fledged their young before the fire. Therefore, the fire did not have a significant impact on the numbers of successful fledglings. However, Eastern Kingbirds were incubating at the time of the fire. Although they were still observed incubating after the fire, there was no indication that any nests produced hatchlings. Bullock's Orioles are common breeders in riparian areas until early August. After the fire, several fledglings were observed, many of which appeared to be premature. However, few Bullock's Orioles were present after the first week of July. Since Eastern Kingbirds and Bullock's Orioles do not molt on the summering grounds, they departed the site early after nests failed. Some species were observed copulating and re-nesting after the fire. However, nesting success appeared to be low for any species that had not already fledged young. An exceptions were Swainson's hawks. Although one nest was destroyed, breeding success of the remaining nests apparently was not affected as at least two nests successfully fledged young.

The fire had a significant impact on breeding sagebrush obligates. The only sighting of a Brewer's Sparrow after the fire was of a single bird that was probably migrating during early September. Before the fire, they were abundant breeders in three-tipped sagebrush zones. Sage Sparrows traditionally have been abundant breeders in big sagebrush zones. By the time of the fire, many had already fledged at least one brood. After the fire only relatively small flocks of mostly juveniles were found foraging on bare ground or in areas that sustained minimal fire damage. These birds completed pre-basic molts before migrating in late September. Loggerhead Shrikes would have fledged their first brood well before the fire. After the fire, the numbers of individuals observed were below average and there were no juveniles found. They have remained on the site until at least late September, completing their pre-basic molt before migrating.
Grassland and riparian areas should recover relatively quickly. ❖

Landbird Monitoring Project begins at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

by Nanette W.H. Seto,
Wildlife Biologist, USFWS

This past summer, Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge NWR) initiated a landbird monitoring project. Nisqually NWR is located near Olympia, WA in south Puget Sound. The refuge is situated in the Nisqually River delta and contains diverse habitats including salt marsh, diked freshwater wetlands and grasslands, riparian areas and upland forests. The objectives of the project were to: 1) document landbird species distribution and relative abundance in specific habitat types on the Refuge during breeding, migration, and winter seasons; 2) identify nesting and transient species using the refuge; and 3) assess habitat use patterns.

Landbird species occurring on the refuge have not been monitored closely in the past. Species distribution and abundance data have been anecdotal, obtained by staff, volunteers, and refuge visitors. Monitoring protocol for this project follows guidelines established for MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) stations and point counts. Four locations in different habitat types were selected for monitoring. The project is proposed to continue for at least 5 years. The refuge is currently undergoing the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan that includes several habitat restoration alternatives. Initiating this study in 2000 will allow refuge managers and biologist to collect 1 to 2 years of pre-restoration data, and 3-4 years of during and post-restoration data, critical to assessing habitat management activities.

Because of funding issues and hiring of additional personnel, the project was initiated in the middle of the MAPS monitoring period. Therefore, this first year of the study is considered a pilot year to work out methodology and logistics. Preliminary data show that a total of 476 birds (31 species) was captured and banded during the second half of the MAPS season. The two most abundantly captured species were song sparrow and Swainson=s thrush. Other common species included: Common yellowthroat, black-capped chickadee, willow flycatcher, and savannah sparrow. Point counts conducted during the MAPS season detected 50 landbird species. During fall migration, 404 birds were captured and banded. Twelve additional species were captured during this period as compared to those captured during the MAPS season.

A book worth reading...

"..(Askins' book is) an excellent pick. I have almost finished reading my copy. It's very readable and does a great job explaining how temperate North America wasshaped/ruled by the disturbances caused by fire, flood, bison, prairie dogs,and so forth...and how the birds have adapted to fit in to such a system."

—Cliff Shackelford
Texas Parks and Wildlife
Austin, TX

Restoring North America's Wild Birds: Lessons from Landscape Ecology

by Robert A. Askins

This book explores why birds are flagships for conservation and discusses why neotropical migrants (e.g. wood warblers) are not the only North American songbirds at risk. It also closely examines human influences on ecosystems and species. This book is appropriate for all readers with an interest in conservation and/or birds, with the conservation angle being the main strength.

(summary by Mark Johns, NC Wildlife Resources Commission Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, NC Coordinator Partners in Flight and Breeding Bird Survey Johnsme@interpath.com)

Restoring North America's Wild Birds: Lessons from Landscape Ecology
by Robert A. Askins
1999, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut
ISBN 0-300-07967-2
paperback, $30.00

WEBSITES

Partners In Flight
www.partnersinflight.org
National PIF Bird Conservation Plans
www.blm.gov/wildlife/pifplans.htm
Colorado Bird Observatory
www.cbobirds.org
Point Reyes Bird Observatory
www.prbo.org
BIRDNET
www.nhnh.si.edu/birdnet
North American Important Bird Areas
www.cec.org
Conservation and Reinvestment Act
www.teaming.com or www.house.gov/resources/ocs
NAWCA Grant Process
www.northamerican.fws.gov/nawcahp.html
Cape May PIF Proceedings
www.birds.cornell.edu/pifcapemay
Raptor Research Foundation
www.biology.boisestate.edu/raptor
Sagebrush Bird Display
www.id.blm.gov/iso/912/enviroed.html
Smithsonian Institute Migratory Bird Center
web2.si.edu/smbc
Royal Blue Organics Cafe Mam
www.cafemam.com
Equal Exchange
www.equalexchange.com/index.html
Thanksgiving Coffee Company
www.thanksgivingcoffee.com
American Bird Conservancy
www.abcbirds.org
Cats Indoors!
Link to this through ABC's website
DOD
www.dodpif.org
EPA
www.epa.gov/owow/birds
Audubon Society of Portland
www.audubonportland.org
Hawkwatch International
www.hawkwatch.org
Oregon Breeding Bird Atlas
www.teleport.com/~guide/atlas/atlas.htm
Index of Sustainable development in the Americas
www2.planeta.com/mader/headlines.html
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
birds.cornell.edu/pifcapemay
Environmental Journalism Resources
www2.planeta.com/mader/ecotravel/period/period.html
Exploring Ecotourism
www2.planeta.com/mader/ecotravel/etour.html

NEW SITE
North American Cowbird Advisory Council
http://cowbird.lscf.ucsb.edu/

USFWS Hires Regional Program Coordinator

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has recently hired Mike Green to serve as the Regional PIF Program coordinator and landbird expert in the Migratory Birds and Habitat Programs office in Portland.

Mike has switched coasts with this job, having lived most recently in Maryland where he worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. With USDA Mike was responsible for monitoring pesticide residues in and around national pest control and eradication programs, evaluating the effects of those residues on wildlife, and consulting with the FWS on the effects of those programs on endangered and threatened species. He has a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of North Carolina, and a AB in Zoology from UC Berkeley. He's been a bird watcher since about age 8, has chased birds in nearly every state, spent a number of years in the Sierra Nevada range and Central Valley foothills conducting various bird surveys and research, and studied grassland bird ecology as a graduate student.

With this job, Mike has focused his career on his primary area of interest and expertise, bird biology and bird conservation issues in the west. Mike's major duties will include technical assistance to Region 1 National Wildlife Refuges and Field Offices in the area of landbird management, monitoring, and research; facilitating implementation of recently completed PIF Bird Conservation Plans on refuges and in coordination with PIF partners; providing expertise on landbird issues for refuge management and planning; and assisting with various landbird conservation issues in the west. Welcome, Mike, back to the west coast.
(Field marks: 5' 7.5", remaining hair blonde, carries old but trusty Bushnell Customs, glances skyward periodically.)

Partners in Flight National Planning Document

Conservation of the Land Birds of the United States, the National Partners in Flight planning document has recently been completed. This 92 page report covers the process and the guiding principals of the development of Bird Conservation Plans throughout the United States. Approximately one page is devoted to a overview of the priority species and habitats and conservation issues and recommendations for each physiographic area.

Copies can be obtained from Bob Altman alt8bird@aol.com

PIF EDUCATION UPDATE

Jennifer Wheeler, International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) coordinator for U.S .Fish and Wildlife Service, would appreciate your help. She is looking for all the people promoting, coordinating, organizing, or simply interested in International Migratory Bird Day in their state, province, or region.

If you are...

- Knowledgeable about a variety of IMBD and other educational activities in your area, and think it would be helpful to be linked (via a listserver) to other coordinators,

- Involved in just the activities of your site/facility, not general coordination,

- Not involved in IMBD or other education projects, but would like information,

...then Jennifer would like to hear from you! Respond to her at IMBD@FWS.gov

Also, production of the eight-page 2001 Partners In Flight IMBD Resource Directory is in full swing. Deadline for submissions is November 30, 2000.

OTHER EDUCATION UPDATES:

HUMMER/BIRD FESTIVAL: Check out this website for information and ideas on the Rockport/Fulton Hummer/Bird Festival that occurred in September: http://www.rockport-fulton.org. Thanks to Charly Holden and Diane Probst for sending in this information.

WHAT'S NEW: A new nature portal offers online searchable field guides to over 4,900 plant and animal species. Derived from 35 different Audubon Society Field Guides, Regional Guides, and Nature Guides, the database is keyword-searchable by group. Give it a try at www.enature.com

NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: If you are attending this conference, there are still a few spots left in the Conservation of International Migratory Birds workshop on Tuesday and Wednesday. This workshop will include a panel of speakers from the U.S., Canada, and Latin America.

As always, please share what you are doing with other educators. It gives us all great ideas. **Respond to IMBD@FWS.gov**

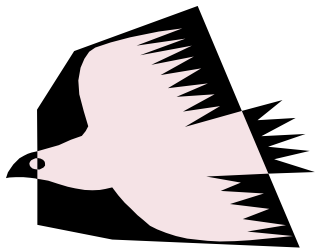
Master Bander Seeks Sub-Permittees

Mario Mamone, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service master permit holder (passerines) is looking for a few good sub permittees. Mamone's new position in Portland doesn't allow him to assist with, or establish bird banding stations. He is offering an opportunity for experienced bird banders to acquire a sub-permit under his master permit, and is willing to provide limited training to less experienced individuals. Mamone will provide bands and record keeping. Send a brief resume describing your banding experience to: Mario Mamone, 416 NE 63rd Ave., Portland, OR 97213, or call (503) 231-8216.

Field Data Updates...

Western Bluebirds Banded by Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project - 1995 to 2000

	Banded	Banded		Adults Recovered		
Year	Nestlings	Adults	Total	Alive	Dead	Total
1995	493	26	519	32	5	37
1996	611	44	655	57	1	58
1997	939	53	992	82	7	89
1998	1198	94	1292	147	14	161
1999	1295	108	1403	250	35	285
2000	1629	104	1733	361	28	389



Western Purple Martin Working Group

The Western Purple Martin Working Group met for its 3rd annual meeting in Vancouver, Washington on October 20, 2000. The group is comprised of private citizens as well as a host of government, retired, non-profit sponsored, and privately consulting biologists from British Columbia, Washington and Oregon who dedicate largely volunteer time toward purple martin conservation activities.

Past emphasis of the group has been to share and coordinate information on color-banding schemes and colony interchanges, and to use the group as a sounding board and partnership for grants and project proposals.

As the Western Working Group grows, northwest regional objectives and a mission statement are developing; this became most apparent at this year's meeting. Members updated each other about known martin population centers in the northwest: Vancouver Island, B.C.; Puget Sound; Columbia River (largest NW population); Oregon coast; and the Cascade foothills. A data gap occurs for California, and the working group is most interested in contacts from this State. The Columbia River area greatly needs assistance with colony inventory. The British Columbia group is receiving color-band return data from colonies on the Oregon coast, Columbia River, and Puget Sound and a 1999 fall migration sighting in Sunnyvale, California. The B.C. group is also working on a genetics study, led by Laura Darling, to test if the western martin is a subspecies or similar in DNA structure to the eastern martin species. B.C. requests participation from other NW population centers; Michelle Tirhi from the Puget Sound area collected samples for the B.C. genetics study in 1999 .

Here is a brief summary of the 2001 objectives finalized at this year's meeting.

* Continue maintenance and monitoring program at existing nestbox and gourd colonies. Encourage expansion of this program within local communities especially where starlings and house sparrows are strong competitors.

* Inventory the presence of martins in upland, open habitats with scattered natural cavities particularly at low to moderate elevations. Martin sightings were located by Kelly Bettinger this summer in clearcuts containing large diameter, remnant old-growth snags and trees.

* Inventory the number of martin pairs at known colonies and areas with man-made structures (e.g. pilings) across the northwest in 2001.

*Report the above data at the 2001 meeting in Lacey, Washington.

Kevin Kritz (kevin_kritz@or.blm.gov) is coordinating the October 2001 Western Purple Martin Working Group Meeting which will be held at the USFWS office in Lacey, Washington. To join the mailing list, contact Cathy Flick (stewart@gorge.net or 509-493-1195). ❖

Implementing Bird Conservation Plans
A Partners-in-Flight / Forest Service Opportunity

January 17-18 2001, Hood River, Oregon

There will be an important meeting between the USFS Region 6 and the OR/WA Partners-In-Flight (PIF) chapter in Hood River, Oregon on January 17 and 18, 2000. The meeting will start at noon on the 17th and end in mid-afternoon on the 18th. A block of rooms is being held at the Hood River Inn. To make your reservations call 1-800/828-7873 on or before January 10th to receive the government rate. An agenda and further details will be distributed at a later date.

The purpose of this meeting is to strategize the implementation of landbird conservation on USFS lands in conjunction with the goals and objectives of Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plans. The meeting will be equally divided between presentations on background information for the USFS and PIF relative to landbird conservation, and breakout groups to develop strategies for accomplishing tasks to implement landbird conservation. We fully anticipate leaving this meeting with a list of specific strategies that individuals can use to incorporate landbird conservation within the context of other land management planning and on-the-ground activities.

We are requesting representation from each Forest Wildlife Program Manager as well as individuals representing the MAPS program, Regional Point Count Program, and the Forest Landbird Coordinators. Additionally, there will be staff from the Regional Office and the Washington DC Office, both as presenters and participants. The target audience includes biologists, ecologists, and other staff at the forest and district levels who have opportunities to incorporate components of bird conservation in their land management practices.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact Barb Kott at 503/622-3191 x687 or bkott@fs.fed.us

Important Bird Area Directory Available

Every year, millions of birds migrate across North America, stopping in a wide range of habitats along the way. Whether as a rest stop for a few hours, or a place to nest for a few months, these 'bird sites' are crucial to the successful migration, well-being and reproduction of hundreds of species of birds.

Without these birds, crucial ecological processes, multi-billion dollar economic benefits, and an age-old source of human joy would be lost. Yet their survival is threatened across the continent, as development encroaches on their habitats and pollution renders them inhospitable. It is a problem shared by Canada, Mexico and the United States, and one they can only solve together.

In order for the three countries to cooperate to protect habitat, a unified effort was needed to identify the most important bird area across North America. The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) was ideally suited to take up this task.

The CEC brought together bird conservation specialists from each of the three countries to identify North American sites critical for the conservation of birds. The results have been published by the CEC in the book North American Important Bird Areas: A Directory of 150 Key Conservation Sites. The directory is part of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative being coordinated by the CEC.

Visit the CEC's web site to download an electronic copy of North American Important Bird Areas:www.cec.org/english/resources/publications/ibas.cfm?format=2

Help us save postage by reading this newsletter on our website :www.gorge.net/natres/pif.html
Newsletter items may be e-mailed to jenny_valdivia@r1.fws.gov

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FALL 2000 NEWSLETTER

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www.gorge.net/natres/pif.html